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## REVIEWS

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### THE OLD AND THE NEW IN ENGLISH TEACHING

There is a story of an absent-minded farmer who, returning from the city after a busy day's shopping, began unharnessing his team with the feeling that something indispensable had been forgotten. To discover what was missing he carefully checked over his packages and bundles, but without discovering any shortage. Not until he carried the parcels into the pantry was he aware that it was "Sara" he had forgotten. He had come home without his wife, who had gone that morning to the city with him. I thought of the story when I completed my first reading of Mr. Thomas' recent book on the teaching of English.<sup>1</sup> I went deliberately to the book looking for what I needed and came away with a whole prairie schooner filled with good things; but nevertheless I had a strong feeling that something was missing. I looked through the whole book again before I realized that what I had missed was the pupil.

There is without doubt much good for all high-school teachers of English in Mr. Thomas' book. It should prove of most value to teachers of English in secondary schools whose chief function is the preparation of pupils to meet the traditional requirements set for entrance to the college or the university. It would seem to be of least value to teachers who are concerned with the momentous problems that arise in teaching English to the vast majority of the pupils in our high schools.

The editor says in his introduction that "the author has first clearly and definitely outlined the values to be aimed at in the teaching of English and the purposes which should obtain; on this basis he has built up a theory of the organization of subject-matter and a theory of teaching the subject designed to develop those potential values so that they may actually achieve their intended purposes." Encouraged by editorial comments upon the "imperative need of orientation and direction" in the teaching of English, the reader might reasonably expect something in the nature of a sustained discussion of changes effected by recent "developments in the fields of educational sociology and educational psychology." It must be with a feeling of disappointment, therefore, that the reader encounters the chapter upon "Basic Aims and Values"

<sup>1</sup> *The Teaching of English in the Secondary School*. By Charles Swain Thomas. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1917.

and discovers that the author's theories, both of "the organization of subject-matter" and of "teaching the subject," rest upon a formalistic educational creed that is in large measure irreconcilable with recent "developments in the fields of educational sociology and educational psychology."

Mr. Thomas' theories appear to be evolved from essentially formal and mechanical phases of pedagogy. Thus, in discussing the relationship between thought and language, he puts first the formal and mechanical aspects of teaching, concluding with the statement that, "having through instruction and practice become more familiar with these technical matters, he [the pupil] becomes increasingly concerned with the task of original creation." The assumption seems to be that the logical must proceed from *the logical*. His hypothesis is specifically that emphasis upon the *logical phrase* will inevitably lead to *logical thinking*, an amazing assumption in the light of modern educational psychology. The nature of the fallacy is obvious when the author goes on to say that "the cultivation of a more mature style will generate a more exact and a more involved process of thinking," that "in teaching pupils to read and write effectively we can make use of this principle in a practical way," that "we can, for example, in the earlier years of the high-school period, dwell upon the process of cultivating a more mature form of sentence structure," and that "gradually by making the more involved forms the basis of drill we may encourage a maturer type of thinking." The suggestions given in these statements are remarkable for their remoteness from the modern concept of education as growth depending upon active participation in the processes of social life.

Considerable contrast between the old and the new is observable in the author's insistence upon the general principles of formal discipline rather than upon the more modern theory of drill with reference to specific aims objectified in actual life. In the enumeration of five *imperatives* supposed to insure the largest possibilities of growth, Mr. Thomas gives first, "Develop a sense of form and organization," and his first desideratum in this connection is "mechanical details." He does not seem to recognize the modern demand for objectives scientifically determined, but gives typical, arbitrary requirements, with this injunction to teachers: "Make concrete demands and hold your students unequivocally to those demands." His emphasis seems to be not so much upon the *nature* of the demands as upon the *rigidity* with which the pupils are made to conform. He is not unmindful, however, of the general indefiniteness of present "concrete" objectives in English, for he urges rigorous dis-

cipline as a panacea for such deficiencies. "These demands," he asserts, "should be insisted upon all the more rigorously because so much English work is, by its very nature, vague and indefinite and offers liberties that some students will grossly abuse; but here the requirements are absolutely specific and allow the most rigid auditing." Necessarily there is a bewildering lack of values when everything is reduced to the dead level of a "tedious stretch of discipline" intervening between the *end* seen in "the master's skill" and the *process* seen in "the neophyte's struggles."

There is a great deal of good in the book despite the principles set forth by the author in his preliminary discussions. Many chapters are, however, peculiarly uneven. The best chapters suffer in consequence. The chapter on "Oral Composition," for example, is filled with practical good sense. Of more than passing interest are the exercises devised to teach exact listening. The discussion is maintained with considerable strength until written outlines are mentioned. Almost immediately thereupon the spirit of rigorous formalism breaks out afresh. This spirit seems to lurk in the wake of the disciplinary process wherever it appears for enforcement. Other chapters are equally uneven. For example, in the chapter on the "Teaching of the Lyric" the reader is given many interesting devices for use in teaching lyric poetry, but is warned that "the charm of poetry is so subtle and so illusive when we try to *capture it and subject it to analysis*, that many find their most difficult task to be the teaching of the lyric." The inference is that appreciation may be taught by a system of analytics, though difficulties are encountered thereby. Thus things go from chapter to chapter, while the doctrine of formal discipline is spread. Mr. Thomas appears ever ready to apply formal discipline as a counter-irritant to unhealthy symptoms, whatever the nature of the symptoms may be. It is a pity that this is true, as there is abundant evidence that the writer has a store of rich experience from which he might otherwise have made more valuable contributions.

It is noteworthy that the discussion in the chapters upon "The Teaching of Prose Fiction," upon "The Teaching of the Drama," and upon "The Teaching of the Essay" tends toward finely granulated sections comprising questions suitable for an intellectual approach to literary study. In the chapter on "The Teaching of the Drama" Mr. Thomas says, "We should not be afraid of the intellectual approach." It is significant that he values memory work in dramatics chiefly as "excellent mental drill" and not specifically as a means of facilitating dramatic presentation. Under the caption "Memory Assignment and

Dramatic Presentation" only one sentence relates to the matter of dramatic presentation. The feeling on the part of many readers must be, no doubt, that the purely intellectual approach is made at too great a sacrifice and at too great a hazard to literary appreciation. No one will fail to observe how far astray the author goes in matters intellectual when he writes on the teaching of the essay, "We shall not have gone far in our reading of the selected essay before we shall begin to notice the author's style—his individual way of expressing himself." *We* surely does not in this case include high-school pupils as well as teachers. Practically the entire chapter on "The Teaching of the Essay" is given over to a schedule of formal study, with emphasis overwhelmingly massed on the side of "structural details."

One explanation of the unevenness noted in the book may be found in the author's persistent tendency to enforce adult standards upon students who are very largely in the developmental stage of their growth. This tendency may be readily detected in such expressions as, "With *mature* classes it may be interesting to call attention," etc., or, "The relationship of rhyme to poetry must be dwelt upon—especially with the more *mature* classes"; or, "The *older* pupils may be taught something of the value of tone color"; or, "Pupils are *too young, too immature, too wavering*," etc.; or, "All except the *immature* pupils in high school will be interested in," etc. These expressions signify an inarticulate effort to force down upon the high-school course of study an educational program gauged too largely by adult standards. That the conclusion here drawn is accurate may readily be borne out by further evidence.

There is much advice given with reference to recent innovations in English teaching. The Groton School Book Club courses in literature are described attractively, but are dubiously passed by as smacking too "much of the Montessori flavor." In lieu of the Book Club a monitorial method of teaching literature is suggested after the manner of Joseph Lancaster. The method suggested "embraces one chief demand—the framing of questions designed to bring out the significant details of setting, plot, and character." Two and one-half pages of questions are given by way of illustration. In connection with the discussion of this Lancastrian method the author comments that "this socializing work if wisely directed and controlled is the most valuable part of the English period." The author's concept of social education presented from this angle seems exceedingly limited. It must, of course, be conceded that the Lancastrian method was pre-eminently antisocial, as the students were massed together and severely hampered in all

activities of a personal or a social character. Under the conditions imposed by this system there can be but slight mind-to-mind challenge of opinion and but slight exchange of sentiment. Occasion is given for almost no social situations permitting enlarging experiences and stimulating ideals. A preponderance of emphasis upon the formal question-and-answer process of instruction is antisocial, and tends rather toward social isolation in the English class than toward socialization.

But the author does not completely forget the pupil. He has something to say about the limited experience of our pupils. "In all of our teaching," he says, "we are too prone to forget that the experience of our pupils is severely limited." A better example and a more common example could not be found of the compromising attitude of teachers toward child-life. The fact of the matter is that the experience of our pupils is infinitely complex and potentially, and practically even, is without limits. The only conceivable limitations to the experience side of normal child-life are set in the pretentious requirements of pedagogues who are befogged in the haze of a dualism that has arisen in their own minds around the child and the school. In another instance the author brusquely comments upon the "indifferent and frowsy habits" of pupils; in another he has something to say of the boys and girls who "have learned the gentle art of slipping over difficulties"; again, he speaks of their "unusual skill in cutting the first *o* out of thorough and getting through." These are perfectly charming characterizations suggesting real qualities, too; but these qualities are truly the least part of high-school boys and girls. Is it too severely critical to say that Mr. Thomas' book is so overloaded with ideas of form and content as to suggest but little abiding interest in boys and girls—in just plain, ordinary, growing young humans? It is not impossible for teachers to be led to such an obsession by matters of routine as to become unmindful of the growing young people for whom both teachers and schools exist.

C. C. C.

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### BOOK NOTICES

[Mention under this head does not preclude review elsewhere.]

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*Religious Education and American Democracy.* By WALTER SCOTT ATHEARN.  
Boston: Pilgrim Press (14 Beacon St.), 1917. Pp. 394. \$1.50.

A plan for a nation-wide organization of religious education through a system of church schools. The author has put his plan into practical operation at Malden, Mass.